

## *Selling Apartheid* **The Facelift in South Africa**

**S**outh Africa's Prime Minister Balthazar Vorster gave himself an ultimatum, and it is almost up. It was in November 1974 that he asked the world to "give South Africa a six-month chance: you will be surprised where we will stand." Six months later, the world has been highly surprised, but is even more puzzled about where South Africa really stands. The surprises have come from the "détente" in foreign policy. Mr. Vorster has visited Liberia. He is turning the screws on the Smith regime in Rhodesia. He is developing an absorbing game of racial scrabble which is supposed to become an "independent" constitution for South-West Africa (Namibia). Foreign heads of state, all of one political plumage, are coming to relieve South Africa's isolation: Stroessner of Paraguay, Bordaberry of Uruguay, Bokassa of the Central African Republic . . .

But what about "internal détente?" Is there such a thing? The great Nico Malan theatre complex in Cape Town

is to be opened to all races. Blacks can now use the costly Blue Train and the Drakensberg Express. So far, this is all.

In the Cape Flats, matters were even less encouraging. The bulldozers came for the squatter village at Philippi at half-past seven one morning, when the men had gone to work. Some had time to get their belongings out of their corrugated-iron hovels before the caterpillars crushed them. Others were less lucky. It rained that night on women and babies sleeping out in the dunes, and next morning the vicious south-easter they call the "Cape Doctor" was blowing, persecuting the squatters with stinging sand as they poked about the wreckage.

You might suppose these people to be drop-outs. But most of them were ordinary urban industrial workers: they want to be respectable, to get to work on time, to bring up clean, educated, non-delinquent children. Jack Silawuli and his wife, for instance, were trying to rebuild the crumpled rubbish of their home. Tall and be-

spectacled, he gets up at 4:30 to go to work at an international oil company.

"All my wages last month I spent on this house. I moved in November, and I didn't have a nice Christmas, no."

Albertina Bachmani had four children, one with a suppurating ear infection: she herself was nine months' pregnant, her papers were not in order for Cape Province, her husband had walked out on her, and the farmer she worked for illegally for \$6.00 a week had given her the sack. You might think nothing worse could happen to Albertina, but the inspector put the tractor across her shack, too.

But why? This seems a senselessly cruel action, when a few miles away the Cape Town politicians talk about modifying "petty apartheid." Unfortunately, it is not senseless. The squatters may look on themselves as urban workers. The Government, however, regards them as tribal Xhosa people, whose presence in urban areas must be temporary and strictly regulated.

*Above Left: Children behind a fence that separates them from the white community near Johannesburg. Center: Staircase in an industrial plant, South Africa. Right: South African worker with his pass book.* United Nations Photographs

by Neal Ascherson

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Everyone who has not been granted a permit to live and work here, under the "influx control" regulations, must go back home: in the Xhosa case, to the barren and overcrowded "homeland" of the Transkei. The Pass Laws operate hectically, pumping a ceaseless torrent of deportees back to a "homeland" many of the Philippi workers have never known, and drawing in a return flow of migrants, legal or illegal, forbidden to bring families and contracted to stay in the huge satellite locations round the white cities for no longer than a year.

This pumping — flow and return flow — is the heart of white supremacy in South Africa, the circulation of its blood. A white accountant said to me: "In economics, they used to teach that prices use the elevator, while wages use the stairs. That doesn't work in Europe any more. But it works here." In other words, the migrant system — by continuously drawing labor out of a primitive subsistence economy and preventing the formation of a settled urban working class — ensures that labor is always cheap, that wages are always slower to rise than the rate of inflation. The constant pass raids, the harassment of the countless thousands of squatters like the Philippi families, keep this circulation going. The poverty of the African "homelands driving their inhabitants back for another round of urban contract work, has the same function. When this circulation stops, white South Africa, as we know it, will begin to die."

#### [FORCES OF CHANGE]

**A**t the President Brand gold mine, you step into the cage and fall a mile. The talk now in South Africa is all of other minerals, of a new base-metals boom to accompany the latest rush of industrial expansion. But gold, the old standby, is still rescuing a land which has everything except oil. The price went up 50 percent last year, while President Brand's costs rose only 18 percent: the mine's post-tax profits are \$3.6 million a month. At the face, where the heat of the earth's core brings sweat leaking over your eyebrows, the Reef doesn't look like gold: just a slanting line of little black pebbles lodged in the shale.

The 12,000 blacks on President

Brand are almost all migrants from outside South Africa. Their wages have risen 140 percent since gold prices started climbing in 1972, reaching a basic monthly minimum of about \$55. (The minimum for the 1,120 white miners went up to \$566.)

In the compound of Number Three shaft, you look into a room which houses twelve men in bunks. Most are asleep: one man in a black blanket is essaying a husky tune on a wooden flute two feet long. In classrooms, young recruits are being taught Fana-kalo, the pidgin language of the mines, which has two hundred words. The teacher points to a drill-bit, to leg protectors, and says a word: the pupils drearily roar it back to him. The kitchens provide a heavy but balanced diet: the white supervisor tells visitors that new miners often put on a stone and a half in a couple of months. It is the efficient but soulless handling of human material for production.

But forces of change are at work. The last 18 months have seen a series of huge compound insurrections, sometimes straight risings over pay, sometimes the fury of sex-starved young men who relieve their frustrations in inter-tribal rioting (28 miners were killed last month when Sotho and Xhosa miners fought at a Natal colliery). The labor supply is dwindling: Malawi has forbidden further contracting, and the other labor-supplying states have agreed to impose new conditions on pay and trade-union membership.

At the same time, the pressure to put black miners in skilled jobs is increasing. The white mineworkers' union sells each job very dearly indeed. But "fragmentation" — the break-up of one white job into several black jobs — goes steadily ahead. Though the white miner retains the monopoly of "blasting certificates," you can watch black miners at President Brand carrying out every stage of the blasting operation while the white man stays within a loosely interpreted "eyeshot and earshot": a mere supervisor.

Industry's hunger for black skills has two effects. One is to intensify the militancy of whites-only unions, like the railwaymen and the building workers, and to edge them into right-wing resistance to the government. The

other is to make employers want to stabilize their labor forces — to break gradually with the whole migrant system — and even to see recognized black trade unions as a source of industrial peace. Between these three antagonistic forces — unrest among black migrant workers, pressure from the bigger employers and reaction from frightened white unionists — Mr. Vorster is painfully trapped.

#### [A NEW MOOD]

**I**m so happy to be here: I wouldn't be anywhere else for all the tea in China. Because now I'm going to see the dénouement. Because Whitey is bringing in the scum of Europe as immigrants, and that shows Whitey is on the run!"

It was a Cape Colored speaking, one of the leaders of the Labor Party, which, as the main militant group representing the two million people of mixed blood, won overwhelming control of the Colored Council last month. Once seated in the provincial parliament of the Cape, the Coloreds have now been systematically forced out of every right and assembly they shared with white men. The Colored Council was invented by the Nationalist Government as the separate "apartheid" parliament for Coloreds. But the Labor Party intends to use its new majority to show up the Council as a hated sham: "We'll blow it up in the face of the government, block the budget, confront them at every turn."

It is among the Coloreds and Indians that the slogan of "black consciousness" really means something. It is the recognition that their difference from the Africans, so sedulously emphasized by the regime, matters less than the common exploitation and humiliation they share with them. The Coloreds beloved District Six in Cape Town is being demolished; its population — as old as the city — is being exiled into remote, barren suburbs. The appalling conditions of Colored farm labor in the Cape, resting on classic debt slavery, private prison farms and the persistent use of the "tot" system (the deliberate addiction of children to raw wine) are changing only very slowly, despite the arrival of modern industries avid for labor. What is new is the mood. A white man

challenged a young Colored using a "Europeans-only" urinal. "How would you like your glasses crammed down your throat, man?" came the retort. The white, paralyzed with shock, staggered into the passageway clutching his zip.

#### [TWO AFRICANS]

**T**wo Africans of South Africa. One riding very high and perilously; the other silenced but waiting his hour. Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, Chief Minister of KwaZulu, is the best-known African on the political stage. Robert Sobukwe, leader of the Pan-Africanist Congress until it was smashed in the early Sixties, after Sharpeville, spent 10 years as a convict on Robben Island. Now aged 50, he lives under restriction in Kimberley. As a "banned person," he may not meet more than one person at a time, stay out at night, leave the town without special permission, or be quoted. Books mentioning his words must have the passage gummed over.

He is still one of the shrewdest political minds in the country, and — with his gift for laughter and self-mockery — one of the most appealing personalities. What would "internal détente" bring? "More crumbs from the master's table! Vorster's six months were never meant to apply to internal change." He foresees a slow breakdown of job reservation, giving blacks "the jobs that whites have vacated, never jobs which make a black the superior of a white . . . There may be more humane application of the Pass Laws, but influx control will remain. Wages will go on increasing, but all the time the disparity with white wages will remain, and even widen."

Sobukwe sees the Government encouraging the emergence of an "African middle class" in urban areas: in Soweto, Johannesburg's black satellite city, some already have cars and servants. "But government policies will compel these people to identify with the laboring class: they have no real outlet for their wealth. Most revolutions are middle-class, and once they have achieved their aims, they can be just as beastly to those below them. Whatever the government tries there must be a coming together of blacks including Coloreds and Indians."

He recognizes that the day of the African mass political parties is over for the moment. "Separate development has shifted the emphasis: it is development, not liberation, that "homeland" politics are about."

Buthelezi is the monster to Vorster's Frankenstein. He uses his position in the Government-created "homeland" to challenge the whole basis of separate development. To an entranced audience at Soweto, I watched him arguing that "détente" is indivisible, and threatening to sabotage Vorster's overtures to black Africa if he "fails to deliver the goods of racial détente" within South Africa." He went on to lodge his people's claim to the white areas: "The economy which draws you to the Witwatersrand belongs not just to the white man but to all the people of this country." Finally, he brought off a typically African coup of oratory, reading out of the solemn paragraphs of Mr. Botha's "away with racialism" speech at the UN with an ironic intonation which made his listeners howl with laughter.

How far can this graceful, brilliant, touchily proud man play his complex game with Vorster, both striving to use each other? Sobukwe, who can see no good in the "homelands," says: "He's honest, but he's already compelled to work within the framework of government policy. He argues for a federal South Africa, because his own position forces him to seek solutions, and the search for solutions which all races can accept means that he will in turn have to make more compromises . . ."

#### [THE HARD CORE]

**A**t Nylstroom, in the north Transvaal, there is a cemetery of tiny, hand-carved tombstones. Here lies little Anna Sofia Venter, aged two, and 500 other women and children who died in a British concentration camp during the Boer War. This is very much a heartland of the Afrikaners. Some optimists even talk of a north Transvaal "Afrikanerstan," a tribal homeland for the Boers in a federal South Africa.

The bar at Naboomspruit, a few miles on, is dominated by the head of a glaring warthog. The farmers, with rugby-playing thighs bulging out of

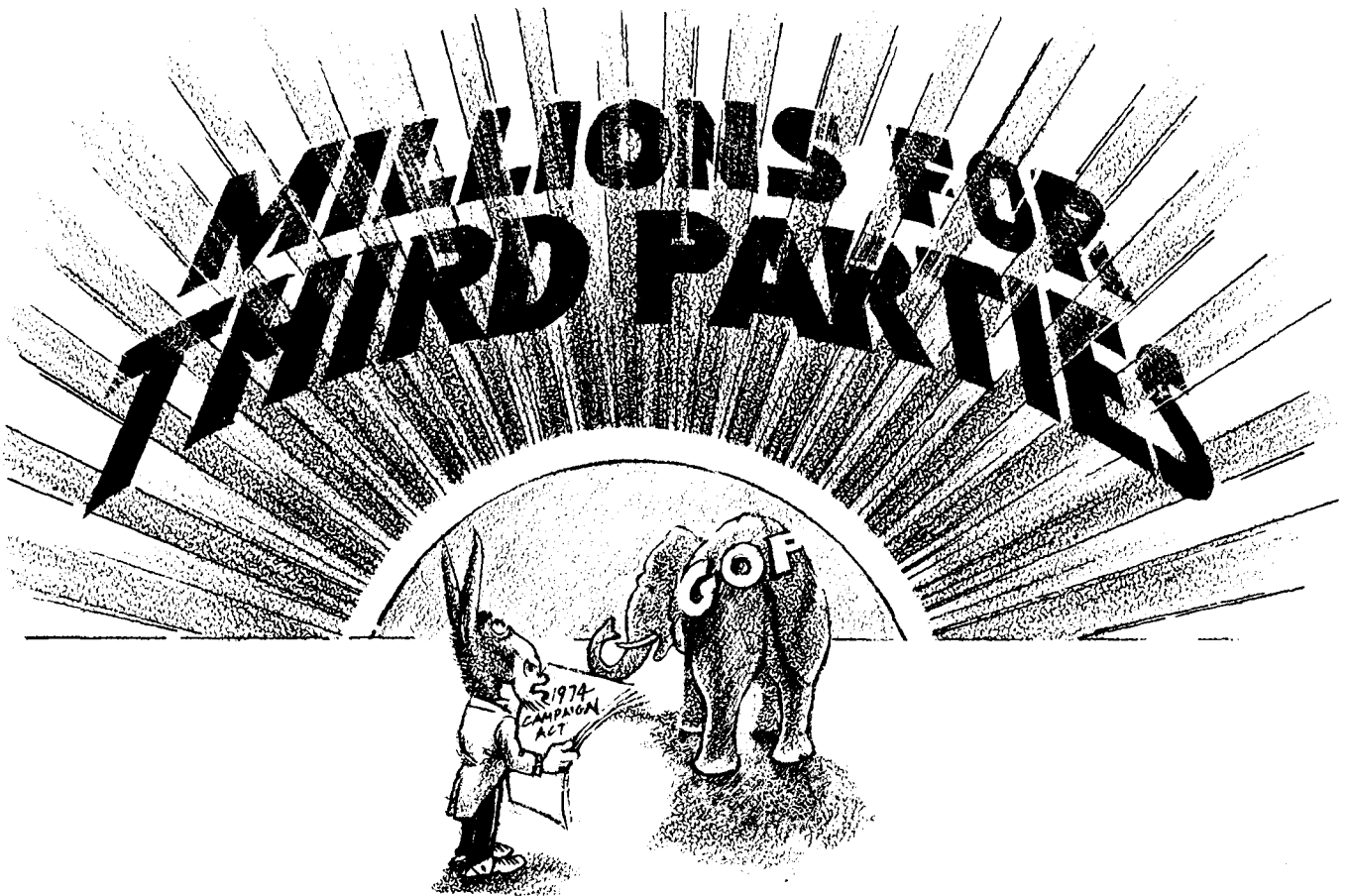
tiny shorts, find the détente puzzling. "You can't associate with these Portuguese immigrants. They have living standards lower than the blacks. My boss boy can speak five languages: some of these Portuguese can hardly write their bloody name. But now our government says we can't even call a Kaffir a Kaffir: we have to say Bantu. You give the Kaffir your finger, man, and he'll want your bloody hand. Ja, you can take a Kaffir out of the bush, but you can't take the bush out of the Kaffir . . ." The granny-knot of mental confusion is pulled even tighter, whenever Vorster courts another African leader: "bloody baboons, all of them. But it's our government: we'll go on voting for it."

Everything is changing. But it is unplanned, sometimes unmanageable change. Vorster probably hopes to combine a reduction of petty apartheid with a tougher law-and-order policy to maintain his hold on the white voters. The danger is that he will be left with only the toughness: the pipeline constantly disgorges fresh political trials, and the new and determined multiracial trade union movement emerging in Natal may tempt him to a fresh outburst of repression. The African "homelands" are rejecting their dependent role, and suffering from galloping impoverishment which must lead to violence (in one Zululand area, the poverty line for a family was set at \$160 a month, and average income turns out to be about \$24).

Chief Buthelezi tells white liberals "not to scoff" at Vorster's policy of détente with southern Africa. But, with deadly perceptiveness, he insists that this must be supported by internal change to be credible abroad. The trouble is that the core of white supremacy — the circulation of migrant labor — is not negotiable, even if whites were ready to abandon race discrimination in sport, culture, transport and the rest of daily life. And most of them are not yet ready. Last year, the sales of guns to whites rose even faster than the price of gold.

*Neal Ascherson writes for The Observer, The New Statesman, and The New York Review of Books. Copyright © 1975 The Observer. Reprinted by arrangement with The Los Angeles Times-Washington Post news service.*





(Nice work, if they can get it)

In law firms and political offices throughout Washington, attorneys and campaign fund-raisers have devoted during the past six months a collective total of thousands of hours to a highly arcane undertaking: The examination, analysis and dissection of a piece of federal legislation known technically as Public Law 93-443, the 1974 amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act.

Signed into law by President Ford last October 15, PL 93-443 is worth millions of dollars to the Democratic and Republican candidates for president and vice president in next year's elections. But "minor" parties and independent candidates are not so fortunate. For, in the process of drafting the highly complex law, Congress constructed an obstacle course of amendments aimed at non-Republicans and non-Democrats which effectively deny financial parity for even a highly popular presidential candidate who is not affiliated with a "major" party. Meanwhile, contenders for the "major" parties' presidential nominations already are in the process of reaping substantial financial benefits from the federal treasury. Specifically, here's what the Republicans and Democrats are eli-

gible to receive under the new law:

- Each of the politicians seeking the "major" parties' presidential designation will be allowed to spend, between now and the time the two parties hold their nominating conventions next summer, as much as \$12 million. And, if they comply with the myriad provisions of the statute, \$6 million of that total will come from federal funds raised through government taxation of the voters.

- The costs of the Democratic and Republican conventions, for the first time in the nation's history, probably will be borne totally by the federal government. The law provides as much as \$2 million for each of the two conventions, which is roughly what the media-oriented extravaganzas have cost in recent years.

- Following the conventions, the designated national candidates of the two "major" parties will be eligible to spend another \$20 million in the general election campaign. And, if the nominees choose the "public financing" option rather than the traditional method of raising campaign funds from individual donors, all of that money will come directly from the federal treasury.

- Finally, the law allows the Republican and Democratic National Committees each to spend approximately \$3 million on behalf of their respective presidential tickets, although that money must be raised through individual contributions.

The government is offering all this largesse precisely when the "major" parties have fallen into an exceptionally low state of disrepute among the nation's voters. The GOP even now may be fighting for its political life. And an increasing number of political analysts have come to believe that both "major" parties may, within the coming decade, become only vestigial political organs.

Consider these figures from a survey commissioned and made public by the Republican National Committee: Interviews conducted in late 1974 with more than 2,000 men and women in 42 states produced 18 percent of all voters who identified themselves as Republicans; 42 percent who identified themselves as Democrats; and a phenomenal 40 percent who classified themselves as independents. A regional analysis shows that in the East and Midwest independents now outnumber either Republicans or Democrats.

by Robert Walters

Illustration by Don Battershall